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ABSTRACT

Using ethnographic research tools, this study explored the role that the symbolic action of administrators played in the the social construction of reality. Case study data were provided to illustrate meaning management at the school district level. Framing this analysis is the application of the categories of critical theory to the study of educational organizations. Critical theory of organizations involves the three tasks of understanding, critique, and praxis. For the purpose of discussing how meaning was managed, data were gathered from 66 interviews; 28 school board, principal, and central office meeting observations; and the analyses of 30 documents. The goal of the study was to obtain perceptions of selected critical events in order to define the elementary reading program in Fairlawn, an affluent suburban school district. What emerged from the study is that program legitimacy is a scarce resource. It must constantly be won and defined by administrators who are aware of the school's sociocultural constructions, which include its language, rituals, and myths. (JAM)

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THE MANAGEMENT OF MEANING AND THE ACHIEVEMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEGITIMACY: A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE PRINCIPALSHIP

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EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION AS THE MANAGEMENT OF MEANING: THE ACHEIVEMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEGITIMACY

Increasingly organizational researchers are exploring interpretivist research methods and constructivist social theories which view organizations as social constructions that emerge from the dynamics of social interaction and negotiation (Burell & Morgan, 1979; Putnam, 1983). Many organizational theorists, in fact, have turned from the study of "organizations" to what they call the "process of organizing". In constructivist theories of organizations, internal organizational structures, such as goals, rules, and roles, do not simply specify and reinforce desired patterns of social interaction within the organization: Instead, internal structures are themselves viewed as the result of social interaction. Such forms of social interaction are variously viewed as involving negotiation (Strauss) intersubjectivity (Greenfield, 1973), micro-politics (Hoyle, 1982), or adjustments to institutionalized social definitions of an organization. (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). All of these theories suggest that the definition of a particular organizational reality is the result of symbolic interaction and that, by implication, the management of meaning is a dominant role of administrators. In fact, Smircich & Morgan (1982) view administrative leadership not as a set of behaviors or a process

of manipulating rewards, but as "a process of power-based reality construction" (p. 270).

In this paper, I will explore the role that the symbolic action of administrators plays in the social construction of reality, providing case study data to illustrate meaning management at the school district level. I will also apply the categories of critical theory to the study of educational organizations. According to Deetz & Kersten (1983), a critical theory of organizations involves the three tasks of understanding, critique, and praxis. 1. Understanding requires an interpretive approach which leads to a recognition of how people create and maintain a shared sense of social reality. An interpretivist, then, attempts to discover the current structures of meaning of an organization. 2. Critique involves inquiry into the process by which these meaning structures become accepted as legitimate and whose interests they represent 3. Praxis is the active engagement by organizational members in the construction of an alternative organizational reality. (1) The three tasks of critical theory: understanding, critique, and praxis will form the structure for the discussion which follows.

The First Task of Critical Theory: Understanding.

The study of meaning management implies that shared organizational meanings do not simply emerge from social interaction, but rather that they are the result of negotiations in which various individuals and/or groups attempt to make their

definitions of reality dominate. Authority relationships in organizational hierarchies encourage a pattern of interaction in which individuals designated as formal leaders are expected to define the experience of others. However, informal leaders often emerge to promote what Smircich & Morgan call "counter-realities". Effective leaders from a management perspective are those who make their definitions of reality prevail. They accomplish this, according to Smircich & Morgan, by framing an aspect of the flow of experience in such a way that what may be complex and ambiguous is transformed "into something more discrete and vested with a specific pattern of meaning"(p.261). Organizational members then "are able to use the meaning thus created as a point of reference for their own action and understanding of the situation" (p. 261). The extent to which counter-realities emerge to challenge, for example, a school principal's imposition of meaning will depend on many factors including the effectiveness of the principal in managing meaning and the extent to which imposed meanings are congruent with over-all district meanings.

A brief analysis of several concepts will help to elaborate the process of organizing in which the prevailing organizational reality is constructed. These concepts are 1. identification, 2. mediation, and 3. legitimation.

Identification

"Middle managers" such as principals, assistant superintendents, and assistant principals in school systems are

situated at the center of a complex web of relations among interacting (and often competing) organizational members and stakeholders. From an administrative perspective the identification by middle managers with organizational objectives is necessary because it guarantees that their decisions will be consistent with those objectives. To be effective, however, organizational identification must have its source within the individual. An "organizational personality" must be cultivated in which the individual finds an area of acceptance wherein organizational values and objectives take precedence in on-the-job decision-making (Barnard, 1968; Simon, 1976). In most school organizations identification is achieved first through the screening of candidates during the hiring process and later through what many sociologists call occupational socialization.

Mediation

According to Smircich and Morgan (1982), leadership in organizations involves mediation - "the interpersonal process linking structure and the human beings who inhabit this structure" (p. 260). Not only must school administrators mediate organizational structure and individual need dispositions, they must also mediate various subunits of the organization among themselves, as well as, to the various school publics and must perform this complex orchestration in such a way that each part appear plausible and legitimate to the others. Although political models of organization have tended to view administrators as power brokers who gain influence and control

over resources through the use of political tactics, a constructivist model views mediation as emphasizing those communicative and symbolic actions through which administrators manage meaning within the organization, as well as, between the organization and its environment. For a constructivist model, the management and contesting of the meaning of things and events is what centrally constitutes politics.

Legitimation

Legitimation is the result of successful mediation. In its broadest usage legitimation represents an explanation and justification of a social order which makes institutional arrangements subjectively plausible. Berger and Luckmann (1967), view legitimation as the primary mechanism through which socially constructed reality is maintained.

> ...the instututional world requires legitimation, that is, ways by which it can be 'explained' and justified. This is not because it appears less real. As we have seen, the reality of the social world gains in massivity in the course of its transmission. This reality, however, is a historical one, which comes to the new generation as a tradition rather than as a biographical memory (p. 61).

Thus, although social definitions have been socially constructed over time, Berger and Luckmann stress that the legitimacy of a definition of social reality can seldom be taken-for-granted, but rather must be accomplished through an ongoing process of legitimation.

Legitimation becomes most visible when the legitimacy of a given definition of social reality is not a foregone conclusion,

that is when the taken-for-grantedness of a definition must be achieved or sustained. To talk of a need to legitimate implies that definitions of social reality do not simply emerge from social interaction but rather are negotiated within contexts of shifting power relations. Therefore, legitimation differs from such similar concepts as public relations, boundary spanning, and socialization in that legitimation stresses the problematic nature of current social constructions. Its emphasis is less on a mere transmission of largely consensual social norms and values than on the maintenance of a given definition of organizational and social reality which often reflects unequal ralations of power. The latter implies a process filled with tension and uncertainty since the management of meaning is an ongoing accomplishment and is best done without drawing attention to itself. To quote Greenfield's (1977) reference to Wolcott's famous cultural informant in The Man in the Principal's Office,

> The urge to judge Ed Bell obscures what he does as a leader...Some might consider Ed's day and say nothing happens in it - at least nothing of major consequence. But nothing never happens in social reality. Something is always going on and that something must be attained, achieved. This is what Ed does as a leader. He achieves what appears to be nothing, but is in fact everything (p. 162).

From the above, it is clear that legitimation is generally seen as supporting and sustaining the status quo. Although this study seeks to explore the critical potential of the legitimation concept, it should not be assumed that legitimation is always called upon to support and sustain a status quo which is

unjustifiable. Siegal (1987) proposes an important distinction in this regard,

> To legitimate a belief (etc.) may mean actually to demonstrate a belief's worthiness; ie. to show that the belief in question is deserving of belief, e.g., on the basis of evidence. But it may also mean to make a belief seem worthy when it isn't, for example, when a suspect ideology props up a belief contrary to a more perspicuous or less tainted reading of the evidence. Thus, "legitimating a belief" may mean showing that the belief is legitimately believed or that the belief is falsely portrayed as legitimate (p. 155).

What makes the distinction between "valid" legitimation and "suspect" legitimation so difficult in the case of principals, is the constant interaction between contradictory goals among publics and levels of the organizational hierarchy. There are also disjunctions between official educational ideologies and the need by administrators to make pragmatic decisions and to make sense out of the minutae of day-to-day events.

A Case Study in the Management of Meaning.

The following case study will focus on the management of meaning in an affluent suburban school district. The emphasis will be on district "middle management", which will include the assistent superintendent in charge of the elementary program and the elementary school principals. Middle managers were chosen because their location in the middle of the organizational hierarchy makes them mediators and monitors of organizational communication. For example, the principal is at once a "street-level bureaucrat" (Lipsky, 1970) who interfaces with

students and the school community, and a link within the authority structure to the central office. Because of his/her location within the organization, the principal, perhaps more than other members, is called upon to manage meaning - that is to interpret the organization to its various external publics and its internal hierarchical levels to each other.

Methodology

Data for the study was gathered during the 1987-88 school year and consisted primarily of interview transcripts, observation field notes, and school documents. In all sixty-six interviews were conducted, twenty-eight meetings (e.g. school board, staff, principal, and central office meetings) were observed, and over thirty documents analyzed. The goal of the study was to obtain as many perceptions as possible of selected critical events in order to explicate the process of meaning management. During the field work the district was in the midst of a battle over the future definition of the elementary school reading program. The following section will discuss the ways in which meaning was managed during this event.

The Fairlawn School District

The town of Fairlawn is more than just an affluent suburb. Unlike those suburbs that are mere subdivisions of urban sprawl or those more ostentatious ones that feature stately mansions and aging populations, Fairlawn is a young, vibrant community which

was an exempted village before being partially engulfed by the neighboring metropolis. Although no longer a rural community, Fairlawn's main street still sports a village green surrounded by red brick, colonial buildings that give Fairlawn the air of a new England town transplanted to the midwest. This small town charm is deceptive though. Along the busy interstate highway that passes just south of Fairlawn are the headquarters of some of America's most prestigious corporations, and many of the executives who work there make their homes in Fairlawn. The town has also attracted a large number of highly educated residents, many of them professors at a nearby state university, who have moved to Fairlawn, in part, because of the reputation of its public schools. Schools are such a selling point in Fairlawn that it is not uncommon for realtors to take clients on a tour of the local school. In fact so popular has the suburb become for middle class families with children that Fairlawn has recently been forced to construct new elementary and middle schools. Urban sprawl has even arrived on Fairlawn's western flank where farm land is being subdivided into housing developments at a rapid pace.

Eighty percent of Fairlawn High School's graduates are college-bound, and the competition for grades begins early. Because Fairlawn escaped inclusion in a bitterly contested desegregation plan in the nearby metropolis, the typical classroom is white and middle class. There are few racial and ethnic minorities among the district's students, even fewer among the teachers, and virtually none in administrative positions.

With the exeception of a growing number of foreign executives and professionals, few minorities make their homes in Fairlawn.

Frank Bradley is the assistant superintendent for elementary schools. A major part of his job is to mediate school board and central office policy to elementary school principals. While technically the district elementary principals' boss, he is viewed by them as a colleague and confidante. He is at the same time able to maintain credibility among central office personnel. Rather than being viewed as a "double agent" he is viewed by both principals and central office personnel as someone capable of consistently maintaining a delicate boss/peer balance with principals because of the trust and loyalty he inspires in them. The principals value him as an advocate for their concerns, while the central office views him as an effective administrator who through his leadership and interpersonal skills succeeds in keeping principals supportive and motivated. In fact, without exception, principals in the district admit to using Frank as a model in dealing with their own teaching staffs.

The Management of Meaning and District Identification

There is, according to Simon (1976), an undesireable effect of organizational identification in that "it prevents the organized individual from making (organizationally) correct decisions in cases where the restricted area of values with which he identifies himself must be weighed against other values outside that area" (p. 218). For example, a Fairlawn principal identifies both with his or her school and its values and

objectives as well as with those of the Fairlawn school district. A significant part of Frank Bradley's job is to monitor principal identification and make sure that district values and objectives prevail. In the following quote Frank coins the verb "Fairlawnize" to describe the process of district organizational identification through which principals must pass in order to work "effectively":

> We firmly believe that we want climate and cooperation. It's our model and if the staff rebels against you, you are not doing it. You are not doing the job. I don't want you to misunderstand that we don't back our principals - we do. The principals understand that; they have been through it. Most of them were once teachers and they know. The ones that come from the outside are the ones that have the problems because they are coming from a different - they don't understand. It takes them a little while. We always say that basically you have to be 'Fairlawnized' to really work effectively.

The "climate and cooperation" which is so important to the organization requires that principals successfully mediate conflicting expectations emanating from a variety of organizational stakeholders. Much like those organizational theorists who view organizations as negotiated orders in which a political model is dominant (Pfieffer 1981; Hall & Spencer-Hall, 1982) these competing expectations often place the principal in a highly political context. In making decisions, however, the principal must identify with the organizational values and objectives whose legitimacy s/he is expected to uphold. Further, to the extent that the school organization is a negotiated order, the principal must develop a keen sense of which values and objectives are negotiable, which are nonnegotiable, and which are

so "given" that they are taken for granted and therefore undiscussible. It is this knowledge of the limits of negotiation which through organizational identification becomes second nature and which constitutes what Frank Bradley calls being "Fairlawnized". Only principals who have made the district's values and objectives their own, and who understand what is and is not negotiable are entrusted with the management of organizational meaning.

Frank Bradley's concern for those principals "that come from the outside" reflects a high degree of confidence that for those principals who have moved up within the system, identification is not a problem since for them "Fairlawnization" has already occured. They simply must learn to identify with their new organizational role. Applicants for principalships and teaching positions who are "outsiders" are carefully screened through a series of inventories and "perceivers". The district utilizes an inventory designed to reveal psychological types in which one is classified as either an "amiable," "expressive," "analytic," "driver" or a combination of two categories. Seven of the eight principals in the district were "amiables", several of whom also rated high as "expressives" on the inventory. This emphasis on "amiable expressives" combines the district's need both for administrators who can uphold the district value of harmony and consensus-building and who can communicate the values effectively.

Overwhelming though this form of organizational control over member identification may seem, it is not airtight. According to

constructivist theory, the social construction of reality in organizations, ie. the process of defining and interpreting what exists, is an ongoing accomplishment. This is because there are always other reference groups vying for the organizational member's identification. It is also because the organizational members' life histories and the values they bring to the job, however muted, remain factors in their degree of willingness to adopt an organizational personality.

The Management of Meaning and the district reading program.

During the year of this study (1987-88) a segment of elementary teachers were promoting a wholistic, literature-based approach to reading instruction. Six of the eight elementary school principals in the district were supporters of the traditional basal program. Two of the eight elementary principals - both in there first year - were behind the scenes supporters of the literature-based "movement". This struggle to define the reading program was largely carried out at the level of meaning management, both by the formal leaders and by the informal or emergent leaders among the teachers.

Effective meaning management often requires more than the framing of experience and the mobilization of meaning through language. Politically strategic moves may be needed to lay the groundwork for meaning management. For example, the two pro-literature principals in Fairlawn, hired pro-literature teachers, quietly put in large book orders for literature, brought speakers to their schools to explain the literature-based

philosophy, and "stacked" the district reading committee with agressive and articulate supporters of literature-based instruction.

The six other principals and Frank Bradley, the assistant superintendent for elementary schools, were skeptical about literature-based instruction and sought to sustain the legitimacy of the basal-based reading program. There skepticism was in part based on a previous unsuccessful attempt to manage meaning in the district. Ten years ago community members had been instumental in putting an end to a controversial non-graded, "open-concept" school. District administrators, caught up in the excitememt of the British primary school model had decided to implement a large non-graded, "open education" program in one of the district's elementary schools. Frank Bradley describes the legitimation crisis that developed and the attempts to manage meaning through changing the symbols rather than substance of the school.

> It was a very conservative community and we could just never sell the program. Just never could. They had some outstanding trachers there. But the thing about it was, it was all in the image. We gradually changed it over, and the way we did it was, we didn't want to change anything other than we would replace the principal and some teachers. We tried to hire teachers that we thought could relate better to parents. In the beginning when we first set that up, we hired them basically for their philosophy, but there were too many of them that couldn't relate to parents.
>
> Gertrude Bennett was the principal that came in and got that straightened around. She had a whole different image. She was an older lady and she was very traditional in her ways and more authoritarian and she was in control and she just sat with those parents. and she told them, and they believed her and it was fine. We started closing the walls more and the parents said, hey, it was OK. And one of the things I insisted on was that we had to be careful about the kinds of teachers we hired in terms of public

> relations...The former principal went from there to another school. He didn't have any trouble there. In fact he's an excellent principal. He learned his lesson.

In the context of the above district history, literature-based instruction was viewed as controversial by most administrators in the district because it utilized a more wholistic and less structured approach to learning which is often associated with "informal" or "open" classrooms. As the ranks of pro-literature teachers increased a struggle for the definition of the district reading program ensued. This struggle was carried out largely at the symbolic level of meaning management as organizational members at all levels struggled to achieve legitimacy for their particular vocabulary (e.g. "literature-based" vs. "literature- supplemented"), rituals, and organizational stories.

The above account also represents a symbolic action which creates meaning for organizational members. As previously noted, the symbolic actions and utterences of leaders frame the context of action in such a way that organizational members are able to use the meaning that is created as a point of reference for their own action and understanding. The removal of the principal from the "open" school for failure to effectively manage the meaning of the school and the resulting organizational story which is recounted more than ten years after the fact, serve to shape the districts social reality. This social reality includes a norm of uniformity which means that the eight elementary schools must in

their essence remain similar. Frank describes the district's norm of uniformity.

> Frank: Basically the elementary program and what we are doing is very consistent and that was our choice. We said we wanted to do it that way. That's what I do. I try to make that happen.
>
> Interviewer: Do you feel there is enough difference between the schools to provide the community with real variety of educational programs? I'm curious, for instance, why there aren't some alternative schools at the elementary level.
>
> Frank: Well, those are choices that we made. We have, at times, experimented with informal education and it didn't work real well for us, and so we moved away from it.

and a Fairlawn teacher comments:

> There is some expectation in the community that the kids will do similar things, and we usually hear about it when they don't. We do hear about the fact that Riverside does something and Morningside does something and Howell does something else. We do hear about that. The awareness is very much there - a built-in expectation that the kids will get pretty similar experiences.

It was partly this norm of uniformity that forced teachers to promote their literature-based "counter-reality" district-wide. The all or nothing approach to innovation in the district discouraged a critical mass of teachers in one school from moving away from basal readers since the school might then become identified as "informal" or "unstructured" leading to a legitimation crisis for the school. It was, however the achievement of a positive perception of the use of literature among a critical mass of teachers districtwide that laid a foundation from which change could occur. This growing counter-reality was achieved in part through the symbolic work of

the two pro-literature principals and emergent leaders among teachers who spoke of "whole" language approaches, using "real books" in classrooms (implying that basals were "artificial" or that they were "texts" rather than "books") and the fostering of "life-long learners" (which they implied could only be achieved through having students read "real books"). Pro-basal principal's objections were not so much philosophical as skeptical about whether the district could "carry it off". They were not sure teachers had the expertise to use literature in such a way that students who needed a skills approach would get it. Mostly, however, when asked about the literature "movement", they would recount a variation of Frank Bradley's organizational saga about the demise of the open education program more than ten years ago.

In its more formal phase, the battle over what degree of legitimacy literature-based instruction would achieve district-wide was fought out within the formal structures of the organization rather than behind the classroom and teachers' lounge doors. In Fairlawn this meant forming a committee. Kathy Martin, a pro-basal principal, explains how this committee came about.

> Kathy: We have this cycle in the district that every five years you look at the reading texts again. But then we were having some money problems so really it was held off for seven years, because Frank was hearing from the teachers in the district, and I was one of those people who would say to him, Frank, we don't need new texts right now. These are still usable. They are right up with things. Teachers are loving them. They are not out-dated, and he was hearing that from other people too. It was in that interim period that some people were talking about, why put money into basals

for us at our grade level? We would like to do literature. And they were talking to him about that. So he decided there would have to be a sub-committee to deal with just that issue of literature-based.

Interviewer: And how did the decision to form a subcommittee come about?

Kathy: I think Frank knew all along that he was going to have to do that from what he was hearing beforehand.

Interviewer: It was really Frank's decision, but it was from pressure from a certain sector of teachers to put that on the agenda?

Kathy: Sure. That's when he said, Kathy, I want you to serve on that committee because I need some balance there.

Thus, although pro literature-based teachers had succeeded in getting on the district's formal agenda, the central office had placed a principal on the committee who was committed to moderating the final proposals that would emerge. Moreover, Frank would chair the committee. Thus, although a group of teachers had succeeded in legitimating the wide-spread use of literature, to legitimate literature-based instruction was another matter. In fact the real struggle in the district ultimately became not the legitimation of the use of literature per se, but rather the legitimation of the use of literature instead of basal readers. The principals, seeing that they could not stem the spread of literature - nor, in fairness, did most of them want to - attempted to reframe the issue as one of a literature-based vs. literature-suplemented approach to reading. Literature-based teachers had succeeded in getting the principals' attention, but the principals were attempting to gain some control over the meaning of literature-based instruction which required not only addressing the instructional issues

involved, but also the very vocabulary which formed the basis of the debate. The teachers had promoted the term "literature-based" instruction. The principals - or, at least, those, like Bill Ford, who were not wholly pro-literature - took exception.

> I almost hesitate to be against literature-based. I'm not against it. I'm for it, but it does bother me a little bit, and I'm a little worried about it. It is another one of those things that come down the road that has got some great things to offer children and the teachers, and the reason I sometimes hesitate and say let's go slow with it or be careful - because it makes me sound like an old stick-in-the-mud who's all for basal readers and basal workbooks and I'm really not, I'm concerned about literature - not so much the word "literature", but the word "Based". It bothers me because I'm not sure our teachers will be trained in developing their own reading program. I think that many of them won't have the time or the expertise to do that, so I think we still need to purchase a prepared reading program, give them that and let them teach it to the children. "Literature-supplemented" I like. In other words give them good literature so that they can get more involved in a story. I want them to read good literature, but I don't think that is all I want them to read. I think there is still some value in the traditional basal texts for word attack skills, vocabulary building, comprehension and this kind of thing. I'm all for a literature supplement to our program, but a literature-based approach, I'm a little nervous about.

As this study drew to a close, the literature-based committee seemed to be moving toward a compromise position. Four models were viewed as acceptable.

1. Basals with some literature enhancement.
2. Half basal and half literature.
3. Literature-based, but with a basal format, (ie. using comprehension questions and word attack skills with literature.)
4. Literature-based with whole language approach in which everything - writing, vocabulary, etc - is generated out of the literature.

Summary

The Fairlawn case illustrates how formal leaders attempt to create legitimacy through the management of meaning and how " counter-realities promoted by informal or emergent leaders can challenge dominant constructions. The final compromise in the definition of the reading program is surely viewed by all parties as a temporary negotiation. The definition of the reading program in the eyes of teachers, parents, school board members, administrators, and students is a constant negotiation which the effective administrator is expected to mediate in such a way that its legitimacy and that of the organization of which it is a part is upheld.

The Second Task of Critical Theory: Critique

The above interpretive account of the management of meaning within the Fairlawn school district has attempted to account for the process through which certain structures of meaning become dominant. Shared meaning systems are created and perpetuated through language use, rituals (committees, meetings, parties), organizational stories, teacher's lounge lore, public relations events, and the routine handling of organizational deviance. The task of critique involves placing the process of power-based reality construction in a broader social context in order to examine to what extent dominant constructions of social reality serve the interests of particular social sectors.

The Organization as Part of a Totality

To say that organizations must be viewed as part of a larger whole is, in a sense, to state the obvious. The recent history of organizational theory has been the history of just such an effort (Perrow, 1976). Nevertheless, in spite of much effort to view organizations as open systems which interact with their environments, there is a general lack of analysis of the connections between organizations and the macro-features of society. A critical view attempts to understand how an organization comes to define its boundaries and why linkages to broader social contexts are not encouraged. Benson (1977), employs the term "dialectical" to describe this critical stance.

> Dialectical analysis is not to be restricted to the narrow, limited, conventional reality promulgated by administrators...It analyzes the intricate ways in which the organization as a rationally articulated structure is linked to its unrationalized context: it explores and uncovers the social and political processes through which a segmental view becomes dominant and is enforced. (p. 10)

Benson distinguishes between two levels of organizational reality which he labels the organinizational "morphology" and its "substructure". The morphology refers to the officially enforced and conventionally accepted view of the organization; its formal structural arrangements, its technological and ideological commitments, its rules and regulations, and its pattern of relations with its immediate environment. According to Benson, the entire explanatory effort of studies at the morphological level "remains within the confines of an abstracted organization ripped from its historical roots and societal context and innocent of its deeper-lying power struggles and negotiations" (p. 11). The substructure of the organization, then, includes the linkages to the larger societal system and include,

> The bases of recruitment of organizational elites; the framework of interests in the larger society setting limits upon the operations of the organization, the power structure controling the flow of resources into organizations and through interorganizational networks; the ties of the organization to social classes, racial groups, ethnic groups, sexual groups, and others in the society; the institutionalized dominance patterns of professions in their sphere of practice; and so on. (p.12)

In viewing organizations as resting upon a broad social substructure, it is important not to fall into the deterministic base/superstructure model of orthodox Marxism. Like the individuals within them, organizations possess relative autonomy

from their societal substructure. In other words, some organizational phenomena are best explained through the analysis of forces internal to the organization or through interactions between the organization and its immediate environment. To be compelled to seek explanations in broader societal forces for all human action and structural conditions within organizations is as limiting as the failure to include such forces in one's analysis. It might be helpful, for example, to view meaning management at the micro level as employed to legitimate professional ideologies, instructional methods, salary structures, curriculum content, and the organization to its environment, while at the macro level it sustains current social definitions of the role of schooling in American society and the legitimating "myths" of meritocracy and equal opportunity that allow the persistence of class, race, and gender-based social allocation to proceed unchallenged. Furthermore, as Willis (1977) and others have illustrated, members of organizations do not simply conform passively to social forces but rather participate actively and creatively in determining their own and their organization's futures.

Therefore, although it may seem forced or far fetched to implicate Fairlawn's administrators in the maintenance of wider social structures of inequality, the legitimacy of such structures and the ideologies that justify them must be upheld by school practitioners since schools serve such an important role in social selection. For example,

> The meritocratic ideology presents particular forms of work and human preoccupations as more valuable and deserving of greater status and economic reward, and the existing hierarchical social arrangements and enormous discrepancies in wealth and power as normal, legitimate, and fair (p. 271).

Like many American suburbs, Fairlawn is primarily affluent and white. The central city on which Fairlawn borders is characterized by widespread poverty, large numbers of minority students, and a desegregation plan which includes busing children to school. Because structural requirements of the social division of labor allocate students to markedly different futures, schools in affluent suburbs receive from society a privlledged, success-allocating, social charter. At Fairlawn High School over eighty percent of its graduates are college bound. In the inner city, a mere half an hour's drive away, the lucky ones are those who graduate at all. It is the rare inner-city high school graduate that ends up in college.

Social Structure and the Allocation of Success and Failure

Stressing the allocative function of schooling, Feinberg (1983) points out that for the educational system as a whole to succeed - that is, to achieve its goal of reproducing the current division of labor in society - it is necessary that some parts of the system fail. Feinberg adds,

> The failure to distinguish between the goals of schooling as related to a particular transaction between a teacher and a child in an individual school and the general goals of the school system itself functions to shield from examination the interrelationship between school and society. Yet it is important to realize that the goals that are

> established by individual members of the school system are done so in terms of their congruence with some aspect of the goals of the system as a whole... The recognition of this attempt to establish congruence should lead to an examination and evaluation of the systemic goal of schooling. (p. 84)

It is this attempt to establish congruence with goals whose logic operates differently at different levels that creates dilemmas for practitioners and discourages broader social analysis.

That schools serve an allocative function which is tied to the structural requirements of the economic system has been recognized, at least, since Talcott Parsons' functional analyses of schooling. There is nothing radical in the concept of an allocative function since all societies have mechanisms for sorting its members into work roles. In most modern societies schools have come to serve this function. What is generally not stressed however, is that in class-based societies, while schools serve as allocators of achievement, they also serve as allocators of failure. Because most metropolitan areas are segregated by social class, it is not uncommon to find schools in suburban communities like Fairlawn that are almost exclusively in the business of allocating success while schools in many urban nieghborhoods have become allocators of failure. This tendency becomes even more pronounced as one moves up the grades from elementary to middle and high school where overt forms of tracking are carried out within a single school. The success allocation function of affluent suburban schools is generally not only acknowledged, but promoted by realtors who know that when

their clients with children buy a house in suburbia, they are also purchasing social capital - the services of a school whose social charter is to allocate success.

The Language of Legitimation

Because these broader social contradictions must be "managed" at the local level, the very notion that real conflicts of interest exist tends to be glossed over. At the local level conflict is often viewed by administrators as something that wastes time, lowers morale and threatens legitimacy. At broader social levels it creates tensions between one's cherished beliefs and the facticity of social inequality. In fact, the promotion of a conflict-free vocabulary in the Fairlawn school district was pervasive, and was the medium through which the extent of one's "Fairlawnization" was revealed.

For example, Frank Bradley, Executive director in charge of elementary principals, is proud of what he calls Fairlawn's "humanistic" philosophy and stresses the importance of selecting administrators and teachers who personify it. Staffs in Fairlawn are "teams" or "families"; arguments are "conversations" or "interactions"; problems are "challenges" or "growth experiences". Optimism, hard work, and harmonious relations are rewarded. Teachers and administrators openly use the vocabulary of psychological typing. People are "expressives" or "amiables" (There are few "driver" or "analytic" types among Fairlawn principals). Everyone insists on "win-win" decision-making, in which people continue to work problems through with one another

until both can come away feeling like winners. In fact, the win-win technique was used in recent contract negotiations with teachers. Extensive and costly workshops and tests are given to determine personnels' leadership styles and hiring of new personnel is also done partly on this basis.

Being "Fairlawnized" requires learning the language of harmony and consensus. The objective is to project the self-perpetuating reality of a world relatively free of real conflict of interest. Whether within the district or the society at large, most principals are acutely aware that such a reality is, at best, a half-truth, at worst, an illusion. A major part of their job, however, is to maintain the legitimacy of the construction of Fairlawn's social reality and the language out of which it is constructed.

The Third Task of Critical Theory: Praxis

As previously noted, praxis is the active engagement by organizational members in the construction of an alternative organizational reality. In order for Praxis to exist, the consciousness of social actors must be viewed as semi-autonomous from the constraints imposed by social structure and environmental factors. In this regard Benson (1977) states,

> They (social actors) are not in any simple sense captives of the roles, official purposes, or established procedures of the organization. The participants fill these 'forms' with unique 'content'. Sometimes they may do so in an automatic, unreflective way; in other periods they may become very purposeful in trying to reach beyond the limits of their present situation, to reconstruct the organization in accord

> with alternative conceptions of its purposes, structures, technologies, and other features. (p. 7)

In the context of organizational research, praxis attempts to combine rational analysis with ethical commitment. It attempts to collapse the fact/value dualism and become the study of society-with-the-goal-of-transforming-it. In the context of educational administration it rejects a view of administration as technique and views it as an inherently ideological enterprise. Foster (1980), addressing the issue of managerial praxis, argues that

> The basic problems of running an organization - educational or otherwise - have been ignored in favor of attempts to find a technology of management. Administration in its most radical form involves the design of organizational structures which meet certain redoubtable human needs - equality, liberty, justice - and it lies with the study of organizations and their administration to discover how modern institutions can cope with the practical dimensions of such issues.

Counter-Realities and De-legitimation

The previous sections have provided an image of organizational and social reality as a tension system in which structural constraints and opportunities for action are in constant dialogue. A downward exertion of control through the hierarchy co-exists with structures of opportunity which occur in the interstices and from all sides.

In spite of the hypothetical opportunities for action, there is much evidence that principals suffer greatly from not only the tight contol exerted on them by the hierarchy and community expectations, but also the need to constantly keep day-to-day,

pragmatic decision-making in line with larger goals and district ideologies.

The Mediation of Contradictions and Legitimating Myths

Contradictions may exist between the goals of different organizational levels, between the statuses principals occupy, or within their own professional ideology. For example, one principal's objection to the lack of social diversity in Fairlawn is grounded in his own experience as a parent.

> All of my kids went through the Fairlawn schools. My oldest kid, who is now in college, wasn't in a class with a black kid till he got into middle school. I think that's disadvantaged.

Another principal had a similar experience with one of her children.

> My youngest daughter who graduated this year and was in the first gifted class at Washington Elementary and was always a bright child and hit middle school and decided Fairlawn was much too cliquey of a place and she didn't want anything to do with it. She was president of the student council at her middle school. By the time she hit ninth grade she was a school phobic and hiding in the closet and not going to school because she didn't want to deal with everything that was there. She ended up going to Ft. Howard School of the Performing Arts in theatre and loved it because she was in downtown Grand City with kids from all over the city and she did beautifully. She left there with a 4.0 average and with the award as the best actress and best director at the theatre school and is a very talented girl who would have suffocated at Fairlawn High School. So, as far as us offering here diversity for our children, we don't. The alternative high school is the closest we get to it and doesn't fit everybody.
>
> I look at what our children encounter and it's certainly not what I would like for them to have as a view of what society is truly like. That is just not there. My daughter got a good idea about it at Ft. Howard. She loved being downtown. She loved being

> with kids of all races and socio and economic levels from all kinds of homes and schools and it was great. That was as much a part of what she did as anything. But the time I spent teaching in the inner-city, and I'd look at those children, and they don't have a view of what life is really like either. Because they are so separate, and I'm not sure we're doing a good job of that at any of our schools in the nation. Very few, I would imagine. It would be wonderful to have a school where you could set an environment that would model society and children could really interact with a diversity of children, but I don't see us as a nation doing a good job of that anywhere.

What the above raised for these principals is a case of status conflict between their parent and principal statuses. As parents they would like to promote a more pluralistic district: As principals they feel they cannot. For these principals conflicts and contradictions are more acutely felt because they have resisted being "Fairlawnized" to perhaps a greater degree than the other principals. They refuse to fully accept the district's rationalizations that serve to legitimate social relations in the district. As Brown (1978), borrowing on Marx' concept of alienation, puts it,

> Like 'primitive man' who must patch together (bricoler) accounts of what goes on around him (Levi-Strauss, 1967), so the modern worker must make 'myths' ad hoc that reconcile the actual processes of his work with the official rhetoric of the organization.

Because these principals are less willing to engage in "mythmaking", the connecting tissue between district ideology, their individual beliefs, and the daily processes of their work is tenuous indeed.

Principals like these can and often do penetrate the ideological nature of many social "facts", and their usefulness

as legitimating rhetoric for groups seeking to maintain social advantages. In the above quote, in fact, one principal was able to turn the very notion of "advantage" on its head, recognizing that the term "disadvantaged" might be appropriated and used to label not just segregated, inner-city black children, but also their white suburban counterparts. As long as these penetrations remain at the level of ideology or official legitimating rhetoric, they will remain partial penetrations (Willis, 1977). Furthermore, as we have seen, there is little a principal can actually do with such insights, except feel more alienated in her work.

It is at the level of hegemony that penetrations might begin to be turned toward the largely unquestioned, socially constructed, structures of organizational life which distort communication and limit action. Williams (1977) distinguishes hegemony from ideology.

> Hegemony is then not only the articulate upper level of 'ideology,' nor are its forms of control only those ordinarily seen as 'manipulative' or 'indoctrination'. It is a whole body of practices and expectations...It is a lived system of meanings and values...which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming.

Such a distinction is not unlike the one Willis (1977) makes between official and pragmatic levels of ideology. At the pragmatic day-to-day level of organizational life, certain ways of doing things take on a kind of practical rationality. Or, as Brown (1978) asserts, "rationality emerges in interaction, and then is used retrospectively to legitimize what has already taken place or is being enacted." (p.369)

It is, therefore, much easier to critique ideological constructs than to seriously question those lived practices which have taken on the force of common sense. The above principal, while penetrating much of the district's legitimizing ideology, defends the structures of practice which contribute to its continued legitimation. Principals, at the pragmatic level will even produce rationalizations for practices they may not feel comfortable with rather than question the rationality of certain aspects of organizational structure which appear to them as social "facts" rather than social constructions. The facticity of certain organizational norms and structures are reinforced among principals in their own informal networks. In the following passage, this principal accepts the district norm of uniformity among schools, and illustrates how principals monitor themselves.

> There's got to be a strand of continuity among schools. If there's not a strand of continuity, then somebody is going to make us, O.K.? You're all going to do this alike, because you can't have eight elementary buildings going off in eight directions. You've got to have strands of continuity, because you're all in the same school system, but still you want to maintain some sort of autonomy, and you know each of the buildings is different, and you want it to be that way, and if you can't maintain those strands of continuity through mutual understanding or getting together and dealing with something that is new and that we all have to deal with.... Let's get it done, but if we can get it done basically in the same way then you don't have some supervisor saying, 'now damn it, you're going to do this, this, and this because all of you have to do it to look alike.

Conclusion

It should be apparent from the above case study that legitimacy is a scarce resource and that the legitimacy of dominant social constructions must be constantly won. Principals, because of their location within the organization are at the crossroads of many of these ongoing legitimation struggles. In the words of Frank Bradley, head of the elementary program,

> The principals - they understand - the ones that have been through it - been through the system. They understand how to do it, but there is a lot of pressure and stress to make that happen.

Although this study concentrated on an affluent school district, it is interesting to speculate on the processes of meaning management in inner-city schools who's social charter is to allocate failure. Recent accounts of "effective" inner-city principals depict them as "turning their schools around" through re-constructing the structures of meaning in their schools (Lightfoot, 1984; Krip, 1989). Through their management of the school's language, rituals, and myths, they attempt to unilaterally created and enforce a new definition of their schools. Those teachers who are not willing to surrender their power to interpret and define reality are encouraged to take transfers to other schools or are gotten rid of. Those that remain are willing to accept the principal's definition because, in effect, the new definition is often mainly for public consumption aimed at bolstering organizational legitimacy. Most teachers in these schools are willing to accept the principal's

definitions of curriculum, teacher roles, etc. in exchange for tighter discipline. No significant emergent leadership is allowed to surface in the informal organization, and formal leadership roles are strictly enforced. These principals are able to impose their definition of organizational reality and achieve organizational legitimacy by projecting a safer, more orderly school.

However, by curtailing emergent leadership and thwarting ownership among teachers of shared organizational meaning, the potential for real school effectiveness is often sacrificed. Furthermore, broad structural inequities in society go unchallenged as the problem is defined locally as disruptive students, teachers with low expectations, and parents who don't care.

Finally, it is important to conclude by reaffirming the work of many of these principals. Bringing an inner city school from chaos to order, though limited, is no small accomplishment. Moreover, the eight Fairlawn principals were outstanding professionals who worked hard at understanding the forces that at times served to frustrate them and thwart professional satisfaction. In studying these forces, I in no way want to accuse these principals of some new version of "false consciousness". Our current understanding of the complexity and interactive nature of social forces makes such notions overly simplistic. This paper has attempted rather to redress an imbalance in research in educational administration. In continuing to seek a technology of management, research in

educational administration has failed both to analyze how dominant social constructions are accomplished and to explore their relationships to broader social structures of inequality.

(1) Although Deetz & Kerston (1983) use the term "education" for the third task of critical theory, I prefer the more commonly used term "praxis". I like the distinction made by Carr & Kemmis (1983) "between practice as habitual or customary, on the one hand, and the informed, committed action of praxis, on the other.

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